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| Ben-Gurion's Letter To Kennedy - MAY 12, 1963                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |
| Secret Eves Only<br>Jerusalem, 12 May, 1963.<br>His Excellency Mr. John F. Kennedy:<br>President of the United States of America,<br>Washington, D.C., U.S.A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |  |
| Dear Mr. President,<br>Your reply to my letter of 26 April was transmitted to me by your Ambassador on 5 May. I appreciate your suggestion to keep in close contact.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |
| You know that even before the establishment of Israel, we owed much to the United States. But we certainly owe a great deal to you personally because of your sincere concern for Israel's security, your pledge regarding the Jordan Water project, your decision to supply the Hawk missiles and for other manifestations of friendship. It is rather for this reason, frankly, that I felt somewhat disappointed when I read your message, though again, I found in it renewed expression of your sincere concern for Israel.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| Allow me first of all to mention a few points that will explain the anxieties which preoccupy me. I have always regarded <b>Nasser</b> with a good measure of respect. I believe that he is an unusual type of leader, perhaps unique in the entire Arab world. He appears to be a man exerting charm and certainly shows intelligence. In his book "The Philosophy of the Revolution" <b>Nasser</b> described his three aspirations: To become the leader of all the Arab peoples, of the Moslem peoples, and of peoples of Africa. As a realist, he understands now that the two latter aspirations are not within his reach. Africa will not accept his domination - although he has yet entirely given up his ambition to bring Africa under his leadership. But he certainly realizes now that the able leaders of the new African countries, in both the East and the West of the continent, will never accept his rule. Likewise he must be well aware that the Moslem countries of Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran and Turkey will not submit to his guidance.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| But <b>Nasser</b> perseveres in his ambition to become the ruler of the Arab peoples and in his faith that Providence has chosen him for that role. In his own country, the largest and probably the most advanced of the Arab countries, this aspiration has not encountered significant opposition. Though there may be a few intellectuals who are dissatisfied with the dictatorial regime, or a number of discontent officers, the Army as a whole and the Egyptian masses follow <b>Nasser</b> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |  |
| Since he is so popular and powerful he is probably the only Arab leader who could afford to take a bold step and make peace with Israel. But unfortunately he has not chosen to pursue that course.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |  |
| I do not think he really believes that Israel is an imperialist base and that the Zionist movement is a world danger. But he knows that this is a useful and popular slogan with which he can incite the masses, who do not even know what imperialism is, but have been told that this is some terrible and dangerous bogey, a label which can be affixed at one time to Britain, at another time to the Soviet Union, more often to the United States - and at all times to Israel.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
| Nor do I believe that he really thinks that the "Liberation of Palestine" is a political, economic or historical necessity for the Arab peoples, who possess larger territories than the United States and in whose history Palestine has never played a significant part. After all, it should not be too difficult for him to understand the significance which the Land of Israel has had throughout history and at the present for the <b>Jewish people</b> (and to some extent for the Christian peoples as well. But he knows that the "Liberation of Palestine" is an exciting slogan, perhaps the only one common to all Arab politicians. He seems to feel confident that if he can overcome Israel he will secure his role as the uncontested leader of all the Arab peoples and thus fulfil his highest ambition to establish his domination over them.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |  |
| I have never met <b>Nasser</b> personally - but I have met scores of people who have talked to him. I have noticed that he is capable of telling everyone what he would like to hear. For example, he told two distinguished American visitors that not more than sixty thousand refugees would want to return to Israel if they were given a "free choice", but to his own people he tells that all the refugees must return to the "stolen country" from which they were "expelled", although he knows - as well as I do - that the majority of the refugees had left the country before the establishment of Israel at the demand of the Arab leaders, in order to facilitate the conquest of Israel by the invading armies.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  |
| He has shown a remarkable ability to play opposing forces one against the other. He thinks that he can replace American aid with Russian aid and vice versa, or to secure both at one and the same time; he is not afraid to antagonize the Soviet Union by putting some Egyptian communists in jail, nor does he feel that he would lose American aid while accusing the United States of imperialism or confiscating private property, or even abusing, in his propaganda, the motives for which the aid was granted.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| I quite agree that at the moment the weak spot in the Middle East is Jordan King is young and courageous, but he is opposed by many people of the West Bank. Hussein also has enemies in Syria and Iraq - mainly Jordanian exiles who fled the country because of their subversive activities against his regime. His people are exposed every day to a barrage of radio propaganda from Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad stirring them up to revolt against the King. He has survived many attempts of assassination, but there is always a danger that one single bullet might put an end to his life and regime. Bourguiba has openly accused <b>Nasser</b> of having plotted his assassination. King Hussein accused <b>Nasser</b> of being responsible for the murder of the Jordanian Prime Minister Haza Al-Majali in 1961. I am not in possession of any particular evidence, but in light of past events one cannot dismiss the possibility that what was done to his grandfather, King Abdallah, could be done to him.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |
| As a result of such an act, a regime is liable to come to power in Jordan that will join up with Egypt and submit to the orders of <b>Nasser</b> and his army. A Jordanian dictator may emerge subservient to <b>Nasser</b> . Whatever it may be, a situation would be created where tanks and guns under <b>Nasseris</b> command or direction would be deployed a few yards away from our Jerusalem, and in the centre of the country or Qalqiliya or Tulkarem, ten or fifteen miles from our sea coast, and our country could be cut in two instantly.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |
| I have lived for decades together with Arabs, worked with Arab labourers in the fields and studied with Arab students in Constantinople before the First World War, I negotiated with many honest Arab leaders in the years 1934-1937 when I was Chairman of the Zionist Executive in Jerusalem. I had talks with leaders of Lebanon: Syria and Egypt, and with representatives of Ibn Saud before the Second World and I have heard during that War Arab leaders praising Hitler as the liberator of mankind and praying for his success.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |
| Knowing them I am convinced that they are capable of following the Nazi example. <b>Nasser</b> is in fact adopting the National-Socialist ideology of the Nazi. For many years the civilized world did not take seriously Hitler's statement that his aims were the worldwide extermination of the <b>Jewish people</b> . I have no doubt that a similar thing might happen to Jews in Israel if <b>Nasser</b> succeeded in invading our army. I know that it is difficult for civilized people to visualize such a thing - even after they have witnessed what had happened to us during the Second World War. I do not assume that this could happen today or tomorrow. I am not so young anymore, and it may not happen in my lifetime. But I cannot dismiss the possibility that this may occur, if the situation in the Middle East remains as it is - and the Arab leaders continue to insist on and pursue their policy of belligerency against Israel. And it does not matter whether it will or will not happen during my lifetime. As a Jew I know the history of my people, and carry with me the memories of all it has endured over a period of three thousand years, and the effort it has cost to accomplish what has been achieved in this country in recent generations. We did not do it only for the sake of those who have already arrived in Israel - but for the survival of Jewry as such. Mr. President, my people have the right to exist - both in Israel and wherever they may live, and this existence is in danger. What I am saying to you does not come out of a momentary passion, but comes from the heart of a man who sees with open eyes what is happening and the way things are going. I am confident that such a calamity, which might befall the remnant of Jewry on its own land is not inevitable; and that it can be prevented. |  |
| The safest way to prevent it, I thought, would be, if it were possible, to have the United States and the Soviet Union issue a joint declaration that any country in the Middle East that refuses to recognize the territorial integrity and refuses to live in peace with any other country in the Middle East in conformity with its obligations as a member of the U.N., would receive no financial, political and military aid from the two powers. It is not Arab unity that endangers Israel today or in the near future, but the dogma that Israel must be wiped out, which the Arab rulers have implanted in the minds of their peoples. The United States and the Soviet Union, if they were able to act jointly, could compel the Arab countries - and first of all Egypt - to abandon their belligerency practiced by economic boycott, the blockade of the Suez Canal, political warfare and hate propaganda, and to cease the military preparations to destroy Israel. Even if the present plan of the Federation should fail - and it might fail this time - the danger will not have passed, for Egypt Syria and Iraq remain united in their aim to vanquish Israel. Even Egypt alone constitutes a danger and its threat grows year by year. A Two-Power Declaration: accompanied by effective measures could change this situation. For Egypt - and it is Egypt that counts - could not develop its war economy without the supply of armaments and other assistance from abroad. I feel quite certain that a unilateral declaration would not achieve our commonly desired effect to deter Egypt and the other Arab States from aggression. The Tripartite Declaration of 1950 was of no value and a reaffirmation of such a declaracion does not meet the situation.                                                                                    |  |
| As you said yourself on 25 August, 1960: <div><div>The Tripartite Declaration is too uncertain of execution and effect to be a useful shield of peace. With countries so close to one another in a sensitive tension-ridden area, a delay of only a few days in international reaction to aggression might well be fata! so a nation's freedom and indeed to the peace of the entire world.</div></div>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| It is true that I had some doubt, already indicated in my previous letter, whether a joint declaration would be feasible at the present time, I repeat/at the present time, because I do not believe that the tension between the Soviet Union and the United States, which has recently increased, must necessarily last for a long time.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |
| Accepting your judgment that joint action by the two great Powers is not possible, there is another way to deter Egypt effectively from persevering in its policy of belligerency against Israel.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
| Mr. President, I believe and suggest that the following measures would be most conducive to ensure the maintenance of peace and security in the Middle East area:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
| 1. It is vital to avert the danger emanating from a change in the regime in Jodan provoked either by the assassination or the abdication of King Hussein or any othe event that would impose a regime subservient to <b>Nasser</b> . If however the present regime should collapse, the only way to avert the danger to Israel is by the complete demilitarization of the area of the West Bank under suitable international supervision.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |  |
| 2. A conclusion of a Bilateral Security Agreement between the United States of America and Israel, with which allies of the United States are invited to associate themselves.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |  |
| 3. You stated the other day in your Press Conference that "to limit the Near East arms race" was one of the important objectives of American policy in the Middle East. But as long as there is no American-Soviet agreement on the limitation of the arms race in the Middle East, massive modern Soviet armaments continue to flow to Egypt and to the other Arab countries, thus upsetting a balance of arms in the area. It is therefore imperative that Israel should be furnished by the United States with all the equivalent kinds of armaments with which the armed forces of Egypt and the other Arab States are equipped. A plan of general disarmament should be instituted between Israel and the United States under a system of mutual and international inspection and control. We have already made such proposals which unfortunately have been rejected by the Arab States. I am not sure that this is a practical proposition in the present circumstances.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  |
| I should not like you to think that I do not deeply appreciate the supply of the Mohk missiles, or the assurances that you gave to Mrs. Meir in Palm Beach and to me in your personal and confidential letters. I value greatly the sincere expressions of concern contained in your last letter to me. I have just received the full text of the statement you made at your Press Conference on 8 May. It again reflects your deep concern for Israel's security and peace in the Middle East and points to the dangers which recent developments in the Middle East foreshadow. This statement might well serve as an opening for the initiation of such measures which I have taken the liberty to outline in this letter.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |
| I also understand your doubts as to my coming to Washington at this time and I entirely agree with you on this point.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
| I have thought it my duty to convey to you in all candour what I think about the present situation in the Middle East and the dangers in store for my people and I feel sure that they can be averted by the adoption of effective measures issued by the United States of America, to which Providence has given world leadership in this fateful time.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |
| Yours very sincerely,                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
| David Ben-Gurion                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/18724-national-security-archive-doc-25-prime-minister                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |